



The image shows a vast desert landscape with numerous sand dunes. The sky is filled with large, billowing clouds, some of which are illuminated by the setting or rising sun, giving them a golden and orange glow. The overall atmosphere is one of a vast, open, and somewhat dramatic environment.

The Definition of an Arab

Shaykhul Islaam Ibn Taymiyyah

THE DEFINITION OF AN ‘ARAB’¹

By Shaykhul-Islaam Ibn Taymiyyah

- With points of benefit from Shaykh ‘Uthaymeen and Shaykh al-Albaanee (raheemahumullaah)

Originally the name ‘Arab’ was a name for people of three kinds:

Firstly: Those whose language was Arabic.

Secondly: Those who were the children of Arabs.

Thirdly: Those who lived in the land of the Arabs which is the Arabian peninsula from the *Qulzum* sea,² the sea of Basra and from the farthest limit of Yemen up to where Shaam begins. So Yemen is included as their land but Shaam is not included. This was the land of the Arabs, at the time of the awakening and dispatch of the Arabs and before it.

¹ From ‘Iqtidaa’ as-Siraat ul-Mustaqueem li-Mukhaalifa Ashaab al-Jaheem (Riyadh: Daar Ishbilia, 1419 A.H./ 1999 C.E.) pp.164- 166 by Shaykh ul-Islaam Ahmad bin ‘Abdul-Haleem bin ‘Abdus-Salaam Ibn Taymiyyah, edited by Dr Naasir bin Abdil-Kareem al’Aql

² This was a former name of the Red Sea.

When Islaam came and spread into large cities the Arabs remained living in these lands, from the far East to the far West and to the coasts of Shaam and Armenia. These lands were the dwellings of the Persians, Romans, Berbers and others.

The lands divide into two:

1. Those places that were strongly affected by the Arabic language to the extent that their people do not know anything except the Arabic language.

Or the people knew Arabic and ungrammatical and colloquial Arabic that had entered the Arabic language. Such as most of Shaam, 'Iraaq, Egypt, Andalus etc and I think that Persia and Khurasaan was like that in the past.

2. The places where non-Arabs were the overwhelming majority such as the land of the Turks, Khurasaan,³ Armenia, Azerbaijan⁴ and similar countries.

These places split into: those who were Arabs from the beginning to those who were Arabs by way of residence and those who are not Arabs.

Therefore, the origins and lineages split into three kinds:

1. People who are originally of Arab descent and maintained the Arabic language and place of origin. Or maintained the language and not the place of origin, or

³ Khurasaan is a huge province in north-eastern ‘Iraan stretching from ‘Iraaq in the west to the borders of India in the east. Its current major cities include Naysaboor (Nishapur) and Mashhad. The Muslims took Islaam there during the time of the Sahaabah. The older ‘greater Khurasaan’ included parts that are now in Iraan, Afghaanistaan, Turkmenistaan and Uzbekistaan. Four of the main historical cities of Persia are located in the older Khurasaan: [Nishapur](#) (now in Iran), [Merv](#) (now in Turkmenistan), and [Herat](#) and [Balkh](#) (both now in Afghanistan). The Mongols conquered it in 1220 C.E. and a powerful earthquake devastated the province in 1997 C.E. See: http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/iran_pol01.jpg

⁴ Azerbaijan is currently situated to the far north of ‘Iraan, one of its famous cities was Tabreez (Tabriz) currently in the extreme north of ‘Iraan. See:

http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/commonwealth/caucasus_cntrl_asia_pol_00.jpg

maintained the place of origin and not the Arabic language.⁵

2. People who are originally of Arab descent, in fact they are from *Bani Haashim* but their language and place of residence became non-Arabic, or one of the two.⁶
3. People who are not aware of their origin and do not know if they are originally of Arabic descent or non-Arabic descent. Most of the people today are of this kind, regardless of whether they were Arabs of the

⁵ In his explanation to ‘*Iqtidaa’ as-Siraat ul-Mustaqueem* (www.alestqmh.com) Istiqaamah Recordings: Riyadh and ‘Unayzah, 1416 A.H, tape no. 13), the Noble Shaykh Muhammad bin Saalih al-Uthaymeen (*raheemahullaah*) was asked **“how can it be possible for a person that does not know Arabic, to be an Arab by way of residence and from the children of the Arabs, even though the person does not possess the Arabic language and tongue?”** The Shaykh responded by saying “Yes it is possible and this is apparent, for example, if there is a person in the Arabian peninsula but does not know the Arabic language. The servants and workers that we have who do not know the Arabic language are spoken to by children in the languages of the servants and workers, not in Arabic. Sometimes a translator is needed, so a child will translate from the language of the servants and workers into Arabic. They are not Arabs originally, but it is possible for them to be Arabs by way of residence and home, but not Arabs by language.”

⁶ In his explanation to ‘*Iqtidaa’ as-Siraat ul-Mustaqueem* (www.alestqmh.com) Istiqaamah Recordings: Riyadh and ‘Unayzah, 1416 A.H, tape no. 13), Shaykh Muhammad bin Saalih al-Uthaymeen (*raheemahullaah*) was asked **“what about a person who is an Arab by language and descent, but loves the countries and states of the West and the non-Arabs, is the person an Arab?”** The Shaykh replied “This is not good, such a person is an Arab by language and descent, but is not an Arab in thinking.”

place of homeland or language, or non-Arabic in one of the two.

Likewise, Arabs by way of language spilt into three categories:

1. People that speak Arabic in pronunciation, articulation and intonation.
2. People that speak Arabic in pronunciation but not with intonation. Such as those who became Arabized and had not studied the Arabic language from the Arabs and spoke another languages, then they studied the Arabic language later. This is the case with most of the people of knowledge that had learnt Arabic.
3. People that no longer speak Arabic, except a little.

So the two groups of people, one of which were strongly affected by Arabic and the other that was more influenced by non-Arabic and those who had already gave in either by power or by custom and tradition.

So if Arabic divides into origin, language and residence then the rulings differ due to the difference in these divisions, especially with regards to origin and language.

The intent here is that what I mentioned about the disapproval of imitating the non-Arabs is just something which was of importance during the early era of Islaam, from the first and foremost people (the *Sahaabah*). As everything that was closer to their guidance is preferred, and everything that differs from their guidance is contradictory. Regardless of whether an opponent to that guidance today is an original Arab by descent or an Arab by language, and this has come from the *Salaf*.⁷

⁷Regarding this the *Mujaddid* of the era, the *Muhaddith*, Shaykh *Naasiruddeen al-Albaanee (raheemahullaah)* said in *Silsilatul-Ahadeeth ad-Da’eeefah*, commenting on a fabricated hadeeth that praises the Arabs: “For Islam’s glory, its repute and its honour is not dependent on the power and strength of the Arabs. That can be achieved without them also, as it happened during the Ottoman period, especially at the beginning of their reign when Allaah (*subhaanahu wa ta’ala*) gave glory to Islaam through them so that Islaam penetrated right up to the heart of Europe. But when the Ottomans began to leave Islamic laws replacing them with those of the European ones, (exchanging the lofty for the lowly), their power and influence declined in those areas, until they lost political power in their own country. Today all that remains is but a little of those appearances that show their Islaam of the past! With their fall, all of the *Ummah* suffered great humiliation. The enemies of this *Ummah* entered into their lands and colonized them all, except for small patches of lands here and there. Now the situation is that although they have been able

to get rid of the colonizers, they remain their slaves in many ways. In any case, the point is that Islaam gains or loses its glory, repute and honour with that of its adherents, be they Arabs or non-Arabs, and as a *hadeeth* states “*there is no superiority of the Arabs over the non-Arabs except by Taqwaa.*” That said, it might be pointed out that as a people and nation Allaah, *Subhaanuhu wa ta’ala*, has preferred the Arabs over all other peoples (by virtue of having raised His last Prophet among them). This is my opinion even though I am Albanian. This is also the opinion of *Ahl us-Sunnah wa’l-Jamaa’ah*. It has a basis in various *ahadeeth* reported on the subject. One of them says, “***From the sons of Ibraaheem, Allaah chose Ismaa’eel, from Ismaa’eel sons, Banu Kinaanah, from the sons of Banu Kinaanah, the Quraysh, from the Quraysh, Banu Haashim and from them Allaah chose me.***” The *hadeeth* has been recorded by Ahmad (4/107), Tirmidhi (4/392) who declares it *Saheeh*, as it is also in *Saheeh Muslim* (7/84), *Bukhaaree* has also recorded it in his *at-Tareekh as-Sagheer* (p.6) through *Wathilah bin ‘Aqsa*. The *hadeeth* is strengthened by another related through a second chain of transmitters starting with ‘Abbaas bin ‘Abdul-Muttalib which is to be found in Tirmidhi (who declared it *Saheeh*) as well as in Ahmad. Another version is to be found through *Ibn ‘Umar* as recorded by *Haakim* (4/84) who also confirms its authenticity.

Nevertheless this should not lead an Arab to have pride in his nationality. Such national pride belongs to the *Jaahiliyyah* days which the Prophet (*sallallaahu alayhi wassallam*) destroyed. Nor should the Arabs forget the fact that it was their intelligence, language and character that led to their choice as the first bearers of the message of Islaam. If an Arab realizes this today then he is more likely to guard those qualities and take it upon himself as a duty to spread the word of Islaam. But if he abandons them, then he has no superiority over anyone. In fact, a non-Arab who bears the same qualities is, without any doubt whatsoever, superior to an Arab. True superiority then comes from following the guidance the Prophet (*sallallaahu alayhi wassallam*) brought, and can be gained by anyone who qualifies himself with the qualities approved by Islaam such as *Eemaan*, virtue, righteous living, *Ihsaan* etc. The Prophet (*sallallaahu alayhi wassallam*) said, “*He who was left behind by his actions will not be brought forward by his lineage.*” In short, true merit is in adorning oneself with certain qualities. When those qualities are lost, the merit is lost: “*There is no superiority of an Arab over a non-Arab except by Taqwaa.*” And this should show the fallacy of the one who calls to Arab nationalism while he is devoid of those qualities that should go with it (being an Arab). Rather such a person is a Westerner both in appearance and in soul!

Al-Haafidh Aboo Taahir as-Silafee in *The Virtue of the Arabs* narrated from Abee Ja’far Muhammad bin ‘Ali bin al-Hasan ibn ‘Ali that he said: “*Whoever is born into Islaam is an Arab.*” This is narrated from Abee Ja’far. Because whoever is born into Islaam is born into the homeland of the Arabs and acquired its speech, this is how the matter is.⁸

Whoever contemplates on what we have mentioned in this chapter will know the intent of the *Sharee’ah* in what we have mentioned from the blessed agreement and the censured opposition to it, as I began with the indications of it, its reasons and the wisdom in it.

⁸ It is mentioned in the explanation of ‘*Iqtidaa’ as-Siraat ul-Mustaqueem* (www.alestqmh.com) Istiqaamah Recordings: Riyadh and ‘Unayzah, 1416 A.H, tape no. 13) by Shaykh Muhammad bin Saalih al-‘Uthaymeen (*raheemahullaah*) a narration from as-Silafee from Abee Qaasim al-Hallaal from Aboo Muhammad al-Hasan ibn Husayn an-Nawbakhtee from ‘Ali ibn ‘Abdillaah al-Mubashir from Ibn Harb al-Mashaa’ee from Ishaaq al-Azraq from Hishaam ibn Hassan from Hasan from Aboo Hurayrah (*radi Allaahu ‘anhu*) who said “*whoever speaks Arabic is an Arab.*”